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FRIENDS OF GORDON RUSSELL DESIGN MUSEUM

Contents

News

Zoom

Axel Munthe - a postscript

The Pursuit of Love

News

The Museum re-opened on Tuesday 18th May and after a quiet first day visitors and takings have picked up. We are still using the online pre-booking system via Art Tickets. If you or any of your relatives or friends wish to visit the Museum then please book and come along and support us. If you have not visited before then let me know and I will endeavour to ensure that a volunteer is on duty who can give you a comprehensive introduction to the Museum and the collection.

Zoom

Since the last newsletter we have had three further Zoom talks. The first by Megan Aldrich on the 'Gothic Revival and the Arts and Crafts Movement', the second by Kirsty Hartsiosis on 'Arts and Crafts in Cotswold Churches' and finally and most recently by our Friend Anthea Harris Fry on 'Carpet Cool'. All three speakers were fluent, knowledgeable and entertaining.

There is a further Zoom talk by Tamsin Wimhurst on the David Parr house in Cambridge. David Parr was a decorator artist who worked for some of the notable Victorian designers; he decorated churches and palaces. His own humble terraced house in Cambridge is an untouched time capsule about which Tamsin will talk on **Friday 25th June at 1800.**

In July and August there will a summer break before we return in September and October with speakers who were due to speak in 2020 but had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. Firstly, Mary Schoeser will talk about Marianne Straub, "A Designer's Designer" and then Magnus Englund and Leyla Daybelge on the 'Isokon Building and the Bauhaus in Britain'. In each case the Talks will be on the last Friday in the month at 1800. Tickets will go on sale in August.

I am contemplating organising an in person Talk for November and I would be very grateful to hear from Friends about the future balance between Zoom and in- person talks. I have no doubt that there is a

continuing place for Zoom because it enables Friends and others who live far from Broadway to see and enjoy our Talks. Equally, I know that there are Friends who miss the opportunity to socialise at our in person events. If we are able to meet indoors in larger numbers at some point after the 21st June how keen would you be for in person Talks to resume?

On the separate topic of day trips by coach, my present view is that it is too early to make any arrangements. What do you think? How confident would you feel about a socially distanced coach trip?

Do drop me an email at hotqc@fastmail.co.uk

Axel Munthe: a postscript

My short piece in the March newsletter prompted two Friends to contact me with further information about Munthe and for a few weeks he became something of an obsession!

It is likely that a significantly longer account will appear in the autumn edition of the Chipping Camden History society newsletter and the full, unexpurgated story on its website. I anticipate organising a Munthe related day trip in 2022 for Friends to the historic Hellens House in Herefordshire.

The Pursuit of Love

Browsing on Amazon Books or even AbeBooks is not the same as browsing in a bookshop. Not least because online those pesky algorithms lead only to the familiar. The joy of physical browsing is encountering the unexpected.

A couple of years ago browsing led me to a second hand Folio Society copy of Nancy Mitford's then lesser known work, 'The Pursuit of Love' published in 1945 four years before *Love in a Cold Climate*. This semi-autobiographical work of fiction is a joy to read, not least for its illuminating Introduction by Hugo Vickers. He tells us that the fictional Alconleigh is a mixture of three Mitford homes, Batsford (a few miles from Broadway) and Asthall and Swinbrook lying close together just to the east of Burford in the enchanting valley of the River Windrush. He also reminds us that the character of Lord Merlin was based on the eccentric Lord Berners of nearby Farringdon who dyed his pigeons the colours of the rainbow and introduced his horse to the drawing room where he painted its portrait.

Friends with long memories will recollect the deliciously scandalous Friends Talk given in February 2018 by Roger Vlitos on the 'Private Frolics of Lord Berners.'

All this came to mind with the recent television serialisation of *The Pursuit of Love*. Then, a few weeks ago when browsing in Waterstones in Cheltenham I unexpectedly encountered 'Tiny Churches' by Dixie Wills, a gazetteer of some of Englands smallest places of worship. A great book for the glove compartment. As you would expect, I immediately looked to see what lay nearby and discovered St Oswald's in Widford an abandoned village only a mile from Swinbrook. You should take the footpath across the fields from Swinbrook to look at St Oswalds with its miniature Georgian box pews and medieval wall paintings; I only know this from the book since the church was locked when I visited in late May!



St Oswald's, Widford

However, of greater relevance to my tale, Dixe's account of St Oswald's advised me to visit the "remarkable St Mary's Church" in Swinbrook where I would find "various members of the Mitford family are buried in the churchyard." St Mary's is indeed remarkable. It is in effect the Mitford family church. Its interior is littered with memorials to members of the family, not least to those who fell in the two World Wars. In the graveyard to the rear of the Church Tower lie four modest Mitford gravestones in a neat row (see photographs). They are of Nancy Mitford, her sisters Unity and Diana and Alexander James Mosley. The Times journalist Ben McIntyre described the sisters as "Diana the Fascist, Jessica the Communist, Unity the Hitler-lover, Nancy the novelist, Deborah the Duchess and Pamela the unobtrusive poultry connoisseur." By an extraordinary co-incidence on the very day of my visit and my writing of this tale the equally scandalous Max Mosley, son of Diana and the British fascist Oswald Mosley, passed away. Alexander Mosley was the elder son of Max Mosley and he died aged 39 in 2009 of a suspected heroin overdose. I could not help but notice that the plot next along, adjacent to that of Alexander was unused and marked 'Reserved'. I wonder if Max intends to lie next to his son. We will probably know by the time you read this.



St Mary Swinbrook



Diana Mosley and Nancy Mitford gravestones



Alexander Mosley and Unity Mitford gravestones

It brought things full circle to see the stone beneath which lie the remains of Nancy. But why a relief carving of a mole? An extraordinary family.

Christopher Hotten
June 2021



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